

Headquarters, CORDS, III CTZ
19 August 1967

Dr. Dan Ellsberg
c/o Mr. Morton Halpern
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
(ISA)
Department of Defense
Washington, D. C. 20301

Dear Dan:

Ev Baumgartner dropped in on the afternoon of the 17th just in time to accompany me in spending the night in Mui Lan Hamlet, Hau Nghia, where we have an RD Cadre Team which does not spend the night there. Although he relayed to me the nature of your tape, I did not have an opportunity to hear the tape until late last night and decided to wait until this morning to write you since my 50 cycle tape recorder plays your 60 cycle tape very slowly and it's hard to understand.

I wrote down your major points off the tape and will give you a hasty answer now and will do quick research to get more specific information for you in the other areas.

a. I have postponed my home leave until 15 November due to the continuing press of business. When I return on 15 November, I will stay six weeks to two months in the States. It will be easy to get together with you then.

b. Colonel Chau is going on an official leave of absence as of the 22nd of this month for 60 days for the purpose of running for the lower house from Kien Hoa. He has made all arrangements in Kien Hoa already and is a "shoo-in" to win -- in his opinion. He strongly desires to make a visit to the States any time between now and 23 October when he again becomes Colonel Chau (unless elected). I have asked Len Maynard to invite him back to lecture at the OCO School in Washington. Please push this with Holbrooke and Maynard since Chau has so much to offer and is so personally desirous. He will be in a "Mr." status and see no difficulty in responding to an invitation.

Overall Comment on the forthcoming Election: Even at this late date, I believe there is a strong possibility that Ky will sabotage either the Thieu-Ky ticket or the election itself and that it may be postponed. I have reliable first

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source information of a conversation with General Thieu wherein General Thieu told this source that Ky is making private arrangements to back the Suu ticket for the Presidency with an understanding that he (Ky) will then be Prime Minister with roughly the same powers he now holds, and that Suu would be a figurehead. I, of course, question whether Suu could get that many votes even with a rigged election, but it's obvious that a similar arrangement could not be made with Huong or any other civilian candidate of stature. Also, there are many supporting and complementary bits of information which indicate that Ky is still champing at the bit of being number two to Thieu. (A possible campaign slogan: "Two - to - Thieu.") Your readings from that distance are not far off. The Thieu-Ky use of the government machinery is blatant, but not so blatant as when it was being used to push the candidacy of Ky. Last Sunday, while I was visiting Colonel Hanh, an ARVN major came by with a group of handbills for Hanh to pass out, and also a stack of 200-page books, printed at government cost, which compiled all of General Thieu's speeches for the last two years and contained numerous pictures of him. Omitted from the book, pictures and handbills was any mention of Ky, although Ky's picture appeared on the handbill.

A great deal of interest is evident in the senatorial races, at least interest by the majority of the country's leaders, whether dissident or not. Nearly every leading figure is on one of the 48 senatorial lists other than those who were included in the 15 lists that were scrapped. It is expected that most of the defeated senatorial candidates will file for the lower house.

Obviously, the civilian candidates should get together under a single banner, but, obviously, they won't. The consensus of the people with whom I have talked is that Huong, as a single civilian presidential candidate would be a cinch to win despite dishonesty by the Government (i. e., the Government is not efficient enough to adequately rig the election if there is only one opposing slate of candidates). At the same time, most of the people agree that without direct US intervention, an elected civilian president would not be allowed to govern and confusion would result. Quite clearly, the situation in Vietnam has never been so demanding of a positive American stand, nor in my view, less likely to get one, than during the forthcoming elections. Huong, Danh and Suu have been quite outspoken and quite critical of the Government, and, frankly, to an extent more than I thought the Government would let them get away with. The English language press has not reported the extent of the public statements of these individuals for although censorship is suspended until the elections are complete, the closing down of newspapers has not been suspended and the most outspoken Vietnamese language daily was closed a short time ago. For this reason, the other editors are playing Ky low key.

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Provided there is an election, then it is probably that Thieu and Ky will win. If they win, they will be largely discredited based upon the manner in which the campaign is run, and they will be accused of having rigged the vote even though it may not be necessary to do so if the civilians fail to get behind one candidate. Given these conditions, the elections will result in little change to the current situation which will result (at least over here) with the American effort, advice and direction being characterized by "more of the same."

I think that we are on the road to doom and that we must change direction and change soon. Jake is very alarmed because, as he states it, "Westy is the best damned subordinate that Bunker has ever had and is so totally responsive to his (Bunker's) requirements that Bunker has formed an extremely high opinion of him and his capabilities. As a result, Bunker accepts the assessment of Westmoreland that the military war is going well and that there is substantial improvement in the Vietnamese armed forces." Jake indicates that Bunker is now so sold on this idea that he (Jake) can no longer afford to push the opposite viewpoint. He (Jake) has warned me to tone down my criticisms of the Vietnamese armed forces' performance when I am around Bunker. I will be the first to admit that, particularly here in III Corps (thanks to Weyand), we are taking a number of American actions that should result in some incremental improvement in the ARVN armed forces, but, as you and I both know, the only substantial improvement that can be brought about is that which starts at the top.

Colonel Chau will be absolutely delighted to participate in the sort of venture Harry Rowan has in mind in Santa Monica. Also, he insists that he could enlist a number of able Vietnamese in such a venture. More on that later, and also remember that Chau's election could change his mind.

Komer has been a big disappointment to me. He has come up with two major programs, one called ICEX (Intelligence Exploitation Committee) for the attack on the infrastructure, and another called Project TAKEOFF which is an "intensification of current efforts." In both major programs, Saigon has developed them exclusively on the American side and has not gotten the Government of Vietnam involved in them, and yet, has asked us to get the Vietnamese involved at Corps, province and district levels. This is, of course, absolute madness and characterizes a continuing failure of the advisory effort in Saigon. The excuse given this time is that the Vietnamese are too involved in the elections to approach them on these matters. This is, of course, patently ridiculous because after the elections are over, the excuse will be the preparations for Tet. I have, quite frankly, never been so dis-

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couraged as I am now because the American community appears to be operating at cross purposes and flying out in every direction. What is desperately needed is a strong, dynamic, ruthless, colonialist type ambassador with the authority to relieve generals, mission chiefs and every other bastard who does not follow a stated, clearcut policy which, in itself, at a minimum, involves the US in the hiring and firing of Vietnamese leaders. The day before yesterday the Gia Dinh Province Chief told me that all of his problems could be summarized in the words, "security" and "corruption." He cited to me subordinate District Chiefs who have ghosts on their payrolls and who he is unable to discipline. He gave as an example a "Chinese" battalion of RF (the 86th) that was made up of people who continue to run their businesses in Cholon. He cited that the Tan Binh District Chief has 582 soldiers on the payroll, but cannot produce more than 150. He deplored a system that prevents him from exercising disciplinary action against such individuals.

I am going to mail you by classified packet a number of Weekly Attitude Survey Reports which have special sections on the election, as well as some recent material that I have put together. I will make inquiries in Saigon this weekend on some of the individuals and matters that you raised, but wanted to get off this quick answer to you.

Best regards,

John P. Vanm
Dep/CORDS

PS: I disagree with any ceasefire or any negotiations. Rightly or wrongly, we are in a position here the only acceptable out is through success. The sooner we begin doing the hard, nasty, disagreeable and effective things which will bring success, the sooner we will be able to get out of this mess. I see no possibility except success. I realize that it may take a decade or two for my government to decide on success and this means a decade or two of continuing down the same dolorous road we are now on.